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## The annual music charts: the communal musical taste mix in Israel

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### ABSTRACT

Radio is a cultural producer and a main player in the music industry. Radio operates a system that determines which music will be broadcast and which music will not make it 'on the air,' functioning as gatekeeper for the general audience. Such a system gives radio significant influence on the music to which listeners are exposed. By way of offering a comprehensive picture of the diverse tastes, styles and trends of popular music in Israel, this article examines the mix of the common musical taste in Israeli society as reflected in the audience votes for the annual music charts that were broadcast on Gal Galatz radio station for 15 years. Findings show that pop music is the most common music in the charts and accounts for 45%, in contrast to rock music, which shows a declining trend. Mediterranean music has grown in popularity in recent years to become an integral part of mainstream music and accounts for a significant proportion of the mix of popular music according to Israeli listeners.

**KEYWORDS** Israel popular culture; radio; music industry; mass communication

Culture has been defined by scholars in numerous disciplines, including social sciences, humanities, anthropology and sociology, each of which shed lights on distinct aspects of the concept. The prominent theories of 'culture' distinguish between cultural producers and cultural consumers; these are typically connected by cultural intermediaries that bring culture from its creators to its consumers.<sup>1</sup> Radio is one type of cultural intermediary that has a significant impact on popular taste in the music industry.<sup>2</sup> Radio functions as a gatekeeper for its audience by operating a system that determines the music that is included in and excluded from playlists, and consequently defines the music to which society is exposed. Although the number of platforms that offer access to music content (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, dedicated music apps) is constantly increasing, radio maintains its status as an important intermediary for consumers. A survey conducted by Israel's

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**Table 1.** Annual international Gal Galatz chart song ratings, by genre, 2000–15 (15 charts).

YEAR	POP	ROCK	RAP\HIP HOP (AFRICAN MUSIC)	OTHER	NUMBER OF SONGS PER CHART
2000	20%	40%	20%	20%	20
2001	45%	30%	20%	5%	20
2002	35%	40%	10%	15%	20
2003	40%	40%	20%	0%	20
2004	40%	25%	25%	10%	20
2005	40%	35%	20%	5%	20
2006	27%	33%	23%	17%	30
2007	53%	30%	15%	3%	40
2008	50%	23%	23%	5%	40
2009	50%	13%	17%	20%	30
2010	58%	18%	13%	13%	40
2011	63%	13%	23%	3%	40
2012	53%	30%	13%	5%	40
2013	50%	33%	13%	5%	40
2014	45%	15%	18%	23%	40

**Table 2.** Annual Israeli Gal Galatz chart song ratings, by genre, 2003–2015 (12 charts).

Year	Pop	Rock	Mediterranean	Rap\hip hop (African music)	Other	Number of songs in the chart
2003	28%	45%	18%	10%	0%	30
2004	33%	23%	17%	23%	3%	40
2005	50%	43%	0%	8%	0%	40
2006	45%	35%	10%	10%	0%	40
2007	53%	38%	10%	0%	0%	40
2008	40%	33%	25%	3%	0%	40
2009	30%	40%	25%	5%	0%	40
2010	28%	40%	20%	10%	3%	40
2011	30%	30%	38%	0%	3%	40
2012	35%	33%	25%	0%	8%	40
2013	35%	33%	15%	10%	8%	40
2014	43%	30%	23%	3%	3%	40
2015	44%	27%	18%	11%	0%	45

Second Authority of Radio and Television found that 74% of the population listens to the radio almost every day, on live broadcast or online archive.<sup>3</sup>

This situation also holds in the United States, where 93% of the population listens to the radio once a week, more than to any other communications medium.<sup>4</sup> Evidence shows that radio consumers are exposed to music more frequently than consumers of other communications media or sources that introduce new music, such as social media, television, newspapers, Internet websites, apps, friends, and movies. Between 2000 and 2015, 61% of the US population reported having been exposed to music because they listened to the radio, in contrast to 25% who were exposed to music through social media.<sup>5</sup>

This article examines the mix of musical tastes in Israeli society, as reflected in the annual music charts of Gal Galatz, a popular radio station,

against the backdrop of the debate over the character of Israeli culture and its composition. It covers songs from the charts in the years 2000–2015, which were classified by popular music genres (e.g. pop, rock, black music, Mediterranean). Findings contribute to informed discussions about culture in Israel, which is an interesting test case of contemporary popular culture production that reflects the incorporation of multiple major musical styles in order to create light, popular hits. The article is theoretically grounded in the Frankfurt School's critical tradition, which considers the media industry's role in lowering the standards of media products and creating shallow, uniform contents in order to maximise profits.<sup>6</sup>

### **The cultural production model**

The cultural production model examines the cultural definitions recreated, disseminated, and taught by “cultural producers.’ Research in this field addresses how cultural symbols are created through mainstream culture, religious practices, science research, literature, art, journalism and more. This body of research focuses on the study of the environment in which cultural content is produced, disseminated, assessed, taught, and preserved and its effect on this content.<sup>7</sup>

Negus argues for the use of the term ‘industry produces culture’ to describe how the cultural industry creates structures and practices in order to produce well-defined, uniform products, in a process that is no different from other product production practices.<sup>8</sup> Yet, he adds, it is equally the case that ‘culture produces industry,’ which is to say that culture is not only created within the cultural industry based on narrow capitalist interests, but it also related to and dependent on other factors outside the industry's control. This approach echoes cultural studies that argue that culture is not a specific good but one that affects ‘the entire totality of life’; one of the means through which people make meaning of their lives. For example, this perspective does not consider popular music as a product produced by the cultural industry but as a more comprehensive construct with practical meanings that are open to multiple interpretations. An analysis of this kind considers music not only in terms of creation and circulation, but also in the context of music production and how consumers interpret and attribute meaning to musical texts.

Cultural production depends on many factors that influence each other, including industrial structure and institutions, laws, regulations and available technology. It is commonly argued that a centralised market for culture exists in which major companies constitute the hegemony and establish a solid, accepted position for themselves.<sup>9</sup> In a centralised market, companies try to reach to a wide audience by appealing to the lowest common denominator and manufacturing products that fit the needs and wants of the masses.

In contrast, in an open market, competition is strong and generates innovation and creativity, and companies manufacture products that match the needs and wants of specific segments of the population. The Frankfurt School drew attention to the consolidated and uniformity of cultural products. Adorno and Horkheimer<sup>10</sup> claimed that entertainment products in all media are similar, as if they were produced in an assembly line. Cultural content is made to fit a ready-made structure, and, as in all other industries, cultural manufacturers' goal is profit maximisation. The main argument of the Frankfurt School is that cultural products are "recycled" and reproduce the existing social order. These products represent reality as 'correct' and relevant by excluding any criticism or different interpretations of social reality.<sup>11</sup> The Frankfurt School thinkers claimed, for example, that previously successful television and radio formats are carefully tested for re-use in a recognisable format.

To better predict whether new artists will sell, and whether artists' new songs will appeal to their audiences, the music industry employs strategies designed to control and create stability and order in consumers' behaviours. These strategies continuously monitor public taste and channel products, artists, and music creators accordingly, such as, for example, when the signing of an artist by a record company is related to commercial decisions and cultural assessments of the artist's prospects of becoming successful and maintaining success over time. Other strategies are designed to stabilise the consumer audience using various means, including market research. One of the more fundamental work practices is the division into musical genres. Genres make it possible to connect music issues ('What does it sound like?') to market-related issues ('Who will buy it?').<sup>12</sup> Notably, Negus considers the record industry a commercial business for all intents and purposes and argues that the division into genres is an economic practice designed to help the record business diversify its economic risks by investing in specific genres based on their potential revenue generation.

An illustration of how such practices affect the market is the US music industry, which has been dominated since the 1980s by a small number of companies that have made the music market less innovative and diverse.<sup>13</sup> These companies aspire 'to make the unknown familiar',<sup>14</sup> and therefore produce musical lines in well-defined genres and adhere to a fixed formula that encompasses words, melody, arrangement, and other features. As a result of the music industry's drive for profit,<sup>15</sup> the music market produces more homogeneous or similar products.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, the cultural production model emphasises the constraints at the foundation of such standardisation.<sup>17</sup> The radio industry is based on formats. Songs go through a selection process based on the format they fit, and only songs that match the format reach the playlists.<sup>18</sup> This process ensures that radio playlists appeal to as many radio listeners as possible. Paterson and Berger have shown that in the mid-1950s, US radio stations

started appealing to more segmented audiences in response to the great competition from television.<sup>19</sup> This process, in which radio looked at the audience as individuals with different preferences and tastes, increased the demand for a variety of music, and growing competition created platforms for new music artists and styles.

In contrast, others claim that concentrated markets could also benefit from greater flexibility in companies' actions because competition creates more possibilities to produce a variety of products for more niche audiences.<sup>20</sup> Because concentration allows products to be produced at a low cost due to syndication options, more budgets are available for diverse productions. A small, concentrated market heightens the motivation to produce different content for a variety of audiences and for different stations, to prevent cannibalisation.<sup>21</sup>

An examination of song playlists of commercial radio stations in the United States shows that mainstream music becomes more constant as market concentration increases. Following the deregulation of US radio content control between 1985 and 1994, major broadcast networks were established, which strengthened concentration in the radio industry. A group of music editors determined which songs would make it to the playlist in each radio station.<sup>22</sup> Even in an 'open production system' that gives new artists and new songs a platform, these remain within the boundaries defined by the hegemony and have similar characteristics to 'mainstream music.'

Radio stations prefer to adopt a uniform, commercially oriented, conservative strategy, so they can 'play it safe' and reach as wide an audience as possible in order to sell air time to advertisers. In fact, advertisers do so using the playlist that offers a "product basket" that is aimed at the lowest common denominator and is not innovative in any way. This commercial approach causes decision makers in the stations to restrict broadcasters' autonomy and avoid broadcasting new and unfamiliar music that might evoke unpredictable audience reactions; they use consultants and consumer surveys to guide broadcasters in determining the kind of music to play. For example, in all music genres, the number of songs that made it to the billboard charts dropped consistently between 1992 and 2002.<sup>23</sup>

Laws and regulations and divisions into cultural segments are important in creating a culture. Some countries support high culture that is conceived as superior, such as museums, theatre, ballet, literature, rather than mainstream culture, which is considered inferior, such as music label companies or entertainment movie companies, while other countries are more flexible and allocate greater resources to mainstream culture.

## **Music and popular culture**

Bourdieu used the term 'cultural intermediaries' to describe the individuals who, so to speak, stand between creators and consumers, and whose function

is to mediate cultural products to society.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the world of music, cultural intermediaries are members of the music industry who mediate music to the masses, such as radio professionals, publicists, and producers. Hennion describes cultural intermediaries' role as mediating between the language of cultural creators and the language of cultural consumers – 'the equal sign that must be placed between two different signs to give one the value of the other' – or the function that matches both parts of the 'equation,' the creator and the consumer.<sup>25</sup> In line with this approach, he describes the functions of music industry producers as cultural intermediaries who create the equation between music and public taste, and in effect, between supply and audience demands.

Radio stations are influential in determining what music will be popular, using a system that selects the music to be on the playlists.<sup>26</sup> There is no single common definition of 'popular music.'<sup>27</sup> Many refer to popular music as music that is subject to the influence of regulations and organisations, new technology, market structure, the music industry, and other factors.<sup>28</sup> Production services and mass publication in the music industry, among others, are what make popular music. Regev claims that prominent features of popular music are 'catchy melodies, easy word memorization, appealing to a broad common denominator ... a product that was manufactured for the mass market using a precise, tested formula.'<sup>29</sup> Popular music is music that contains simple, uncontentious lyrics. It is characterised by its eclecticism: popular music draws from tradition and different styles, packed in a recognisable format.<sup>30</sup> Regev emphasises that it is not the distribution of the music that makes it popular but rather the social-cultural connections to manufacturers and distributors such as connections with the music industry and 'the cult of stardust.'<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Denzin pointed to the measurement problem: like fashion, the popularity of music is determined by users and therefore can be measured only in retrospect.<sup>32</sup>

Initially, pop-rock culture expressed rebellion. Over time, pop music was formed from a collection of different music genres of music that became "mainstream music' and 'lost the power to be subversive.'<sup>33</sup> Today, pop music is a tune that is not meant to 'annoy' listeners. The popular claim is that pop music is commercialised and easy to market; It is an easily sold consumer product, as opposed to art that maintains its status as an authentic product. The main features of pop and rock music range from glum and loud sounds that express anger, fury and other negative emotions, at one extreme, and light-hearted and enjoyable sounds, at the other extreme.<sup>34</sup> Pop-rock music merges both styles. This kind of music is diverse and consists of many musical genres and styles gathered under an "umbrella' of a common ground.

Music editors play an important role in the music process by homogenising music by labelling different songs using familiar well-defined

categories.<sup>35</sup> Adorno refers to this as merchandise, and emphasises standardisation as the essential feature of popular music.<sup>36</sup> In his research study on popular music Adorno claims that standardisation is expressed in several ways: a fixed song structure, and repetitive content and rhythm. Everything is created from a single pattern to achieve the main goal and create a final result – a familiar sound experience.<sup>37</sup> According to Adorno, popular music is a cultural product, part of mass media that function as a ‘safety valve’ that gives superficial joy, yet its main purpose is to preserve the hegemony and the existing social order.

Radio stations claim that the song selection process is conducted professionally, yet in many cases considerations are commercial and ignore the audience. A song that is selected to be on the playlist in one station will be quickly added to other stations’ playlists: this is how songs become popular. In many cases, the music industry works and fits itself to the radio industry and its needs.<sup>38</sup> There are, however, other studies that describe music editing in the radio as a system that has a unified method based on economic and organisational considerations that lead to standardisation of the music. These researchers highlight the different methods of music editing and the methods used to decide what songs will make to the playlist. Editors may employ more cautious approaches to new songs and artists, which gives priority to more familiar songs to ensure that stations maintain their profits. This approach is not designed to educate the audience; it is meant to adjust the station’s selections to the audience. Other stations, however, constantly seek new music that ‘surprises’ their audiences.<sup>39</sup>

The division between commercial radio and public radio is important for understanding the decision-making approaches to content distribution and music editing. For example, the main aim of public radio is to educate the public and promoting the public interest, in contrast to commercial radio, whose goal is to generate profit.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, commercial radio operates as a business: its main motive is profit so its social benefit is questionable. The commercial radio system gives listeners an opportunity to choose content – specifically, entertainment content – that suits them, and station managers prefer to stick to traditional and familiar formats to prevent risking potential economic benefits.<sup>41</sup> These considerations are not typical of public radio, which is free of commercial considerations, and whose decision making about the broadcasting, formats and music is more flexible. Even so, the fierce competition between radio stations compels public radio to introduce major changes in its broadcasting policy and to align with the media environment to prevent its audience from defecting to rival stations.<sup>42</sup> For example, the BBC network’s music stations broadcast music that is not different from the music broadcast on commercial radio stations in the UK. Nonetheless, the network tries to be a leader in musical tastes and promotes local British music more than commercial stations.<sup>43</sup>



## Development of radio in Israel

Radio was first used in Israel during the British Mandate, made possible by the Fourth Aliya and the British presence ('Radio Broadcasting in Israel'). With the establishment of the State of Israel, the Voice of Israel (Kol Israel) was established as the official radio station. Over the years, Kol Israel Radio stations, had almost exclusive broadcasting privileges.<sup>44</sup> These stations represent a public broadcasting model.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1990s, Kol Israel developed educational radio stations for educational purposes in educational institutions in order to educate and empower students, pupils and people who live in the periphery.<sup>46</sup> At the same time the establishment of the Second Authority for Television and Radio, commercial regional broadcasting began.<sup>47</sup> This was a major change in radio broadcasting in Israel, which increased the range of broadcasts in Israel and their volume. These stations are operated by private franchisees and their broadcasts are under the supervision of the Second Authority for Television and Radio. This represented a change in radio from public service to profit motive, an approach focused on appealing to the tastes of listeners.<sup>48</sup>

In Israel, public and commercial radio stations exist alongside military stations, Gal Galatz and IDF Radio,<sup>49</sup> representing a unique broadcast model. IDF Radio was initially established as a content station, and was supplemented by Gal Galatz, its musical arm,<sup>50</sup> in a response to the proliferation of pirate radios, specifically the Voice of Peace, which was responsible for the introduction of pop culture in Israel.

Military broadcasts targeting civilians are not conventionally found in democratic states: The broadcasts of Israel's military radio stations are unique in that these stations are considered to be bastions of democracy and the breeding ground of the country's top media professionals.<sup>51</sup> As military stations, they could conceivably serve a military agenda and play an instrumental role in inward propaganda. Early in its history, IDF Radio would frequently broadcast jingles with patriotic messages and slogans, but in contrast to military radio stations in other countries, the station was never used to convey outward or inward propaganda. Its official aim was mainly civilian education (as was the official aim of the country's foremost civilian radio station, The Voice of Israel). Over time, the station adopted a professional approach that supported the expression of diverse opinions and counter-opinions.<sup>52</sup> The Israeli stations' digression from the norm for military stations has and continues to spark debate on its practices, such as the potential conflict between the station's commitment to media ethics and norms, as a media organisation that broadcasts to the civilian population, and its compliance with the dictates of IDF and the Ministry of Defence, to which it is formally subordinate.<sup>53</sup> The musical character of Gal Galatz also evokes considerable controversy

over the proper role of a military radio station. In 2015, for example, the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport declared the need to oversee the military station because of Gal Galatz's status as a major station that has a formative impact on the Israeli music market and affects other radio stations.<sup>54</sup>

In recent years, Gal Galatz has been the most popular music station in Israel with a listening share of 34%, according to TGI.<sup>55</sup> The station clearly targets mainstream music, to appeal to the largest and most diverse listening audience, in terms of age, musical preferences, and cultures. To this end, Gal Galatz broadcasts 'chunks' from a wide selection of musical genres to diverse audiences, from Mediterranean music, through rock, to electro-nic music.<sup>56</sup>

Most radio stations in Israel edit and broadcast music in a 'partial playlist' that is designed to promote new music. In this editing model, new songs are added to the playlist every several weeks. Generally, most stations in Israel lack a specific musical line that guides their broadcasting, so they simply follow the lead of the major stations. In contrast, Gal Galatz uses the playlist method, which is considered to be the station's invention in Israel, although it is popular all over the world, especially in the United States. This method is based on the AC (adult contemporary) principle, designed to target a wide audience by appealing to the lowest common denominator. This editing method combines hit songs with nostalgic songs, emphasising easy listening that does not irritate anyone.<sup>57</sup>

In Israel, there are three main music genres: nostalgic Israeli (Hebrew) songs, pop-rock, and Mediterranean music.<sup>58</sup> The two leading music stations in Israel, Gal Galatz and Reshet Gimel, offer a clear musical pop-rock line. In the 1990s, there was more of a demand for local Israeli music, and in response to rating considerations, radio stations in Israel started to broadcast more Israeli songs and add them to their playlists. For example, stations such as Lev Hamidina and Reshet Gimel adopted a Hebrew musical line, which led other radio stations to increase the amount of Israeli music they broadcast: Gal Galatz, for example, increased its Israeli playlist to about 50%.<sup>59</sup> However, Gal Galatz leads the musical taste in Israeli society and many musicians are keen on being included in the station's playlist. The developments in Mediterranean music illustrate this motivation, as musicians gradually toned down the oriental elements in their music and made it more similar to pop-rock style music containing some Mediterranean character. It seems that musicians understood that these adjustments were required to ensure their inclusion in the playlists of more stations.<sup>60</sup> In fact, between 1995 and 2010, the distinctions between the dominant Israeli music styles on radio have become blurred and most are defined under the general heading of 'Mediterranean pop.'<sup>61</sup>

## Cultural globalisation

Cultural globalisation or cultural imperialism are terms used to describe the flow of cultural products from western countries, especially the United States. Cultural globalisation describes the way that identities and local cultures are changing and are redesigned according to western cultural products such as Hollywood movies, American pop music, and international brands. For example, McDonald's has become a symbol of American culture and cultural globalisation.<sup>62</sup>

In the music field, globalisation affects the motivation to 'borrow' from foreign elements and music styles and incorporate them into the local music culture. In this manner, cultures adopt diverse influences from different places such as elements from South America, oriental elements, African beats, and European influences. Globalisation has increased the pop-rock phenomenon, which has become increasingly popular and dominant all over the world over time.<sup>63</sup> This phenomenon has been described as follows: 'The essence of this process is the sweeping adoption of the typical pop-rock music ensemble and its transformation into the accepted ensemble in popular mainstream music.'<sup>64</sup>

## Mass communication consumers

The cultural production model and the studies cited above discuss cultural producers' organisation and the production process, emphasising the hegemony that they seek to preserve. It is equally important to study how this culture is received by consumers. Contrary to studies that identify specific cultural products that prevent society from resisting or critiquing capitalist thinking, a growing stream of research emphasises consumers' capability to interpret and understand media messages otherwise than producers' original intentions. Based on the recognition that the process of communication does not end with the transfer of a message but in its interpretation by the recipient, these studies focus on the features of cultural recipients and their worlds, values, culture and ideas, social and cultural connections, family structure and interpersonal relationships, time, and place, which all determine how consumers process the meaning of a message and how it affects them. Reception research effectively shifts the focus of research from cultural producers to makers of cultural meaning<sup>65</sup> and the consumer's role in interpreting and giving meaning to communication texts. Several theories go as far as to assume that a communication text is entirely open to and readable by the consumer. These theories note that communication discourse is intentionally polysemic, due to the desire of communication producers to gain popularity and match the needs and wants of as wide an audience as possible, allowing each text to be 'encoded' with a wide range and

variety of interpretations by different consumers,<sup>66</sup> based on their social class, their culture, and education level. “The dominant ideology is structured in the text, as it is structured in the social system, and this structure of the text allows room for resistance and negotiation.”<sup>67</sup>

Hall claims there are three approaches to understanding cultural texts: (a) according to the dominant hegemonic approach, the communication text is encoded and the dominant message is received as is; (b) a multicultural approach to interpretation that combines message reception and resistance, recognising the gap between reality and the idea presented in the text; and (c) an oppositional approach that challenges the delivered message and the social reality inherent in it.<sup>68</sup> Hall does not ignore production process, professional norms, daily routines, social class, political stand and other features that frame the message,<sup>69</sup> yet his model emphasises how power is transferred from the cultural producers to the consumers. His main innovation is the understanding that message comprehension based on the social configurations and power relations in which the message is produced and in which it is additionally received and interpreted, and which it influences.<sup>70</sup>

## Research questions and hypotheses

The research question of this article is: What is the predominant music mix in Israeli society? We posit the following four hypotheses:

- Pop music will be found to be the most popular genre in the common mix. This hypothesis is based on research literature, which posits that more genres are collected under the ‘umbrella’ of pop music.<sup>71</sup>
- The popularity of pop-rock music with rebellious, subversive undertones has declined in recent years, based on the broad research literature that points to musical editors’ tendency to prefer to integrate ‘easy listening’ music that does not irritate anyone.<sup>72</sup>
- The popularity of Mediterranean music has increased in recent years. This hypothesis is based on several studies that identify an increasing demand for Mediterranean music.<sup>73</sup>
- The Israeli music mix is similar to the international mix. This hypothesis is based on cultural globalisation processes related to issues of genre and music elements incorporated into the local music culture.<sup>74</sup>

## Methodology

To examine the ‘larger picture’ and understand the popular genres and trends in Israel, we examined annual Israeli and international charts broadcast in Gal Galatz radio station, which is the most popular station in Israel,

with a listening rate of 34% in 2018.<sup>75</sup> A total of 975 songs from the past 15 years were examined.

Two types of annual hit parades were studied: the annual international hit parade (featuring songs produced outside Israel) and the annual Israeli hit parade (exclusively featuring songs of all genres produced in Israel). The annual hit parade is based on listeners' rankings of a pool of contending songs. The station posts a list of songs and listeners submit their 10 most favourite songs. In this manner, the station retains the role of gatekeeper and listeners merely determine the order in which the songs are played. The list includes songs that were broadcast over the year at a high frequency.

The songs from the charts were classified individually, independent of the performer's other songs, background, or association with a specific genre. The genres used to classify songs were: pop, rock, hip hop, rap, Mediterranean, and other (the latter category included dance, world music, hard rock, and electronic music). The research literature defines pop-rock as a single genre, although several sources consider pop-rock as two distinct genres. Songs were classified by a professional music editor and former manager of the Gal Galatz record library, whose function was to edit shows and music and playlists. Assigning the classification process to this highly experienced music editor strengthened the credibility of the song classifications. The songs were then coded by a second coder, a former senior musical editor at Gal Galatz, to confirm the accuracy of the classification. Inter-coder reliability was 98%. Descriptions of the genres and coding instructions follow.

## Music genres

### *Pop music*

Pop music is characterised by a catchy melody and easy-to-repeat lyrics, and appeals to a broad common denominator – the mass market.<sup>76</sup> This kind of music is commercialised and not considered art. In effect, pop music is a collection of many genres framed in a familiar pattern for mass consumption under one umbrella.<sup>77</sup> The melodic structure of pop songs is very simple (verse-passage-chorus-verse- passage-chorus, double chorus); the content is simple and uncontroversial, critical or complex; and the register is low, to match most listeners' language. This music is meant to make people happy and emotional, and not provoke unconventional thinking.<sup>78</sup> The use of computerised music is common in pop while rock is typically based on live instruments. Most pop singers are featured on other media including television, gossip columns and other communication channels.

Significant examples of songs that were classified 'pop':

[International artists] Sia ‘Chandelier’; Taylor Swift – ‘Shake it off’; Katy Perry – ‘I kissed a girl’; Britney Spears – ‘Womanizer’

[Israeli artists] Roni Doani – ‘Sod’; Aya Corem – ‘Simple love song’; Harel Skat – ‘How much more’; Rita – ‘To train a tiger’

### **Rock music**

Rock music is based on live instruments, especially guitar, bass and drums, and less strongly on computerised music. Rock melodies are more complex and less standard (although simple melodies do exist). The lyrics are unique, more critical, and have a serious message.<sup>79</sup> Rock music evolved in the 1950s and combines various genres such as folk, alternative, new vibe, heavy rock and more.

Significant examples of songs classified ‘rock’:

[International artists] Depeche Mode – ‘Wrong’; Florence and the Machine – ‘Shake it off’; Red Hot Chilli Peppers – ‘Did I let you know’

[Israeli artists] Synergia – ‘Blame’; Ivri Leader – ‘Blue cup’; Mashina – ‘Good little thing’; Monica Sex – ‘Blocked years’; Mercedes Bend – ‘Day and night’

### **African music**

African music is very diverse, and encompasses many genres, including hip hop, rap, rhythm and blues, soul, gospel, and dancehall. Black music originates from African music that was brought to America by black slaves. Today, singers may be of any ethnic origin as long as they maintain the rhythm and the atmosphere of black music. Sometimes black music contains subversive statements related to local, political, and gender issues.<sup>80</sup>

Significant examples of songs that were classified ‘African music’:

[International artists] Eminem – ‘We made you’; Nelly – ‘Just a dream’; Christina Aguilera – ‘Ain’t no other man’; Alicia Keys – ‘No one’

[Israeli artists] Subliminal – ‘Finally’; Dag Naachash – ‘Here I come’; Tuna – ‘It will pass’; Black Coffee – ‘It will be OK’

### **Mediterranean music**

Mediterranean music is Israeli music with Arab roots that arrived in Israel through immigrants from Arab or Mediterranean countries. The beats are Mediterranean while instruments are eastern (darboka, bouzouki, etc.). Singers typically add trills and a Mediterranean flavour to the performance. Mediterranean music is composed of many genres including Greek, Turkish, Moroccan, and Yemenite music, rock, east pop and other genres.<sup>81</sup>

Significant examples of songs that were classified ‘Mediterranean’:

Eyal Golan – ‘Days will tell’: Peer Tassi – ‘Peace path’: Amir Benayun – ‘Storm’: Dudu Aharon – ‘From above’

## Findings

The current research instrument was coding songs from the charts. After coding, the distributions of song genres were calculated for each year, and multi-annual trend analysis was conducted, by genre as seen in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#).

The following graph shows the distribution of hit chart songs by musical genre.

As seen in [Figure 1](#), pop songs and rock songs account for one half and one quarter of all songs in the charts, respectively, between 2000 and 2015.

A moderately strong positive relationship was found between year and share of pop songs in the chart ( $r = 0.678$ ) as seen in [Figure 2](#).

A moderately strong negative relation was found between year and the percentage of rock songs in the charts ( $r = 0.647$ ).

[Figure 3](#) shows that pop music is on the rise in the international charts. Rock music shows a sharp decline in the last 15 years since the height of its popularity in 2000.

The following graph shows the distribution of songs in the annual hit charts, by genre, 2003–2015.

[Figure 5](#) presents the share of songs in each genre that were broadcast in the annual charts between 2015 and 2003. According to [Figure 5](#), between the years 2003 and 2015, the most popular music genre was pop (accounting for 40% of the songs in the charts), followed by rock music (35%) and Mediterranean music (20%).

No relationship was found between the percentage of pop songs in the charts and the chart year as seen in [Figure 6](#).

A moderate negative relationship was found between the chart year and the percentage of rock songs in the chart ( $r = 0.428$ ).

A moderate and positive relationship was found between the chart year and percentage of Mediterranean songs in the chart ( $r = 0.43$ ) as seen in [Figure 7](#).

Findings show that pop music was the most popular music genre in the charts throughout the entire period of the study (2000–15). Rock music showed a declining trend over this period, while the popularity of Mediterranean music rose steadily over the period of the study. Furthermore, similar trends were found in the Israeli and the international music charts: Pop music was the most popular genre in both types of charts. Rock music was also popular but shows a declining trend. In recent years, Mediterranean music has increased in popularity, to become an integral part of mainstream music, and consequently captures a significant share of the Israeli music mix as seen in [Figures 4](#) and [9](#).

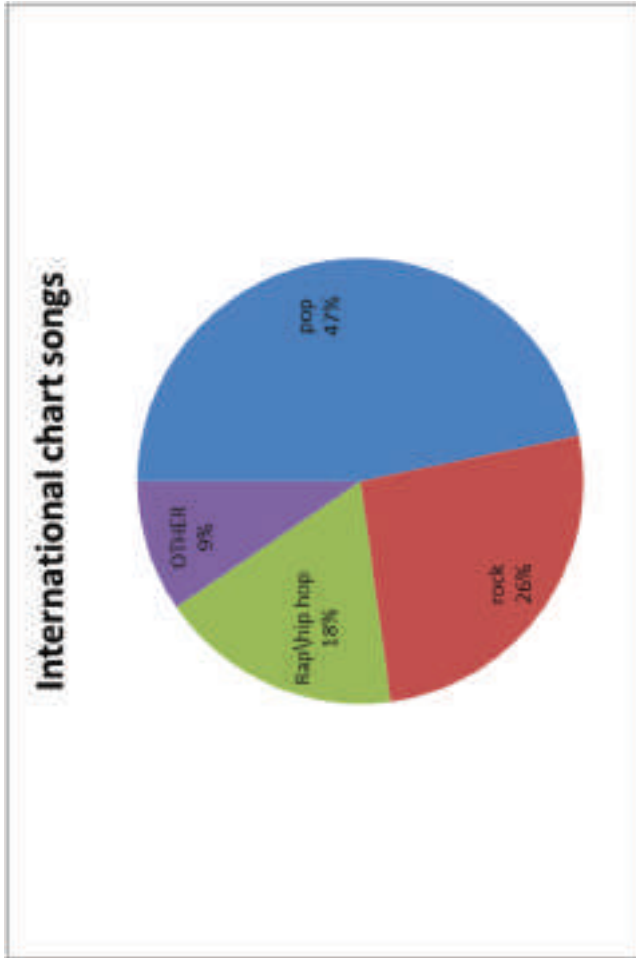


Figure 1. International chart songs by genre, 2000–2015.



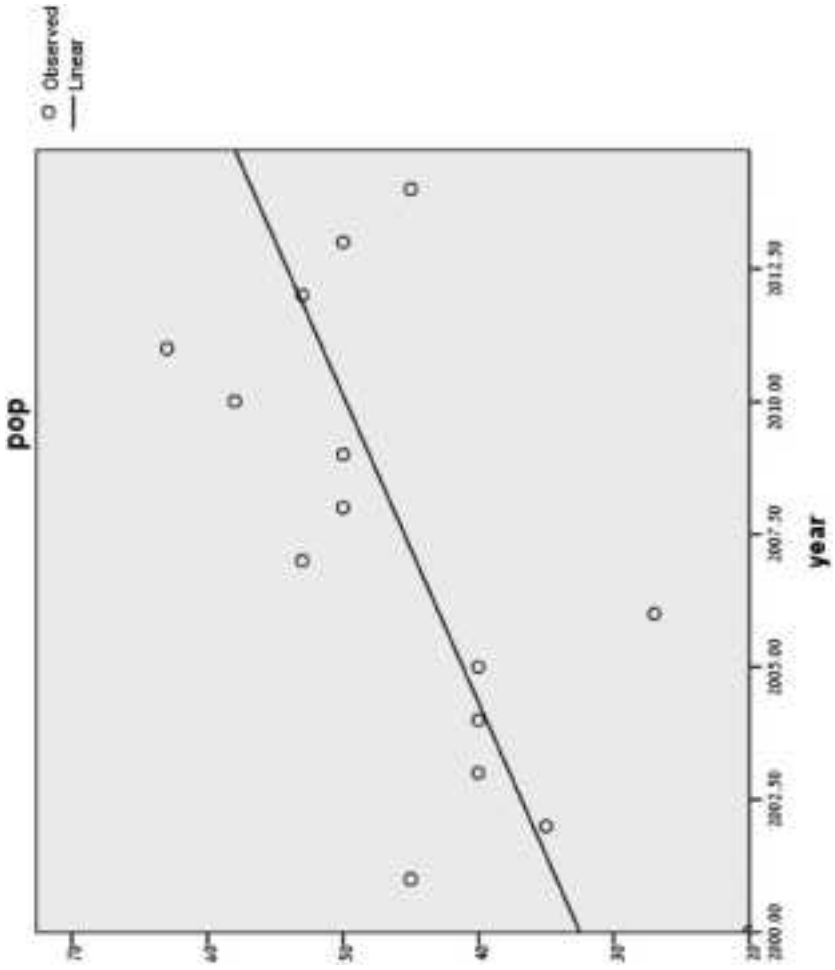


Figure 2. Pop music in international charts, 2000–2015.

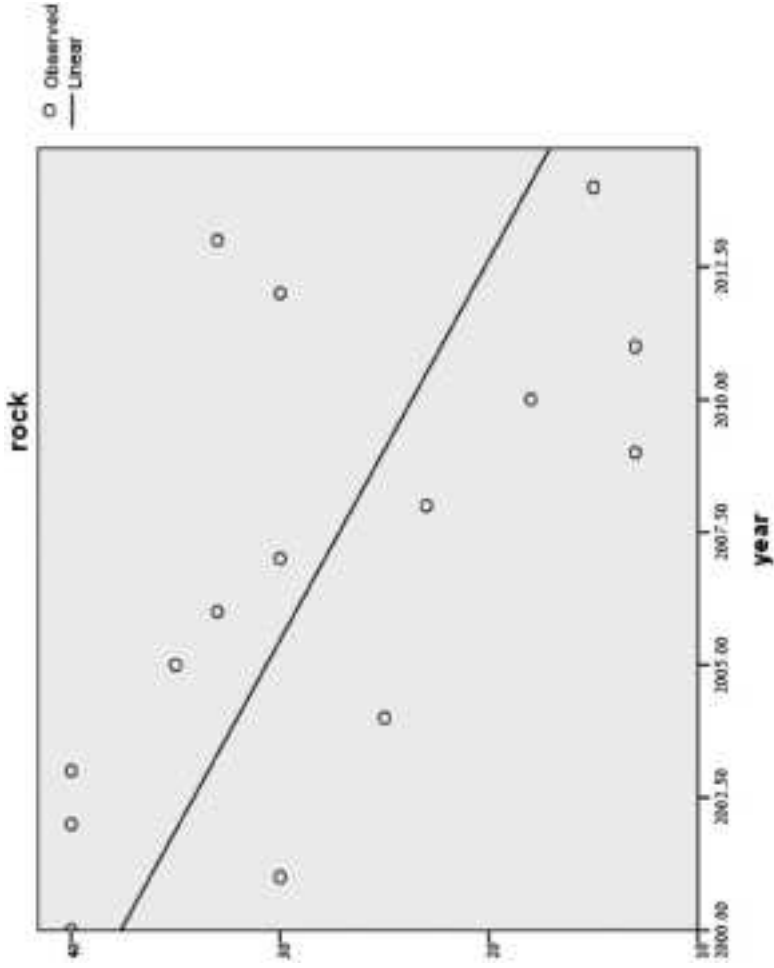


Figure 3. Rock music in International charts, 2000–2015.

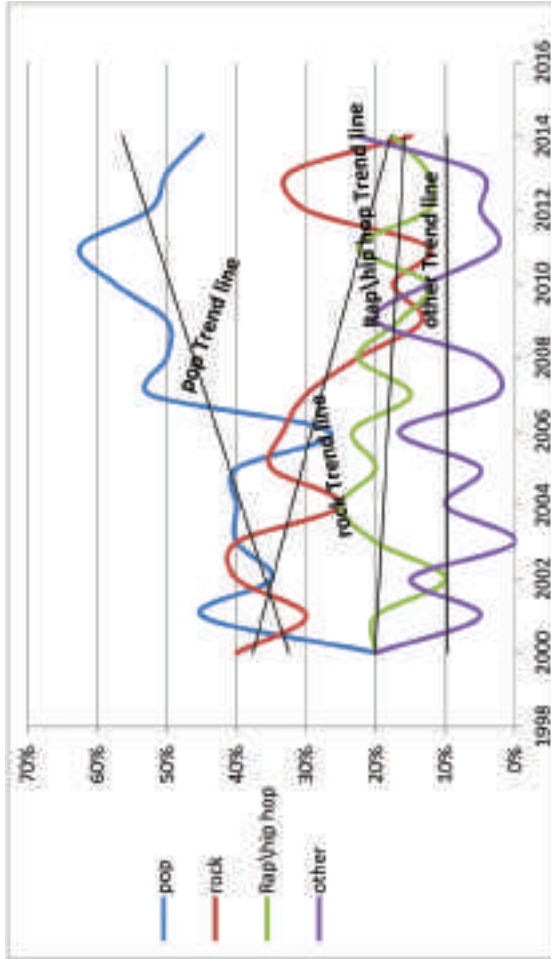


Figure 4. International charts, 2000–2015: trend analysis.

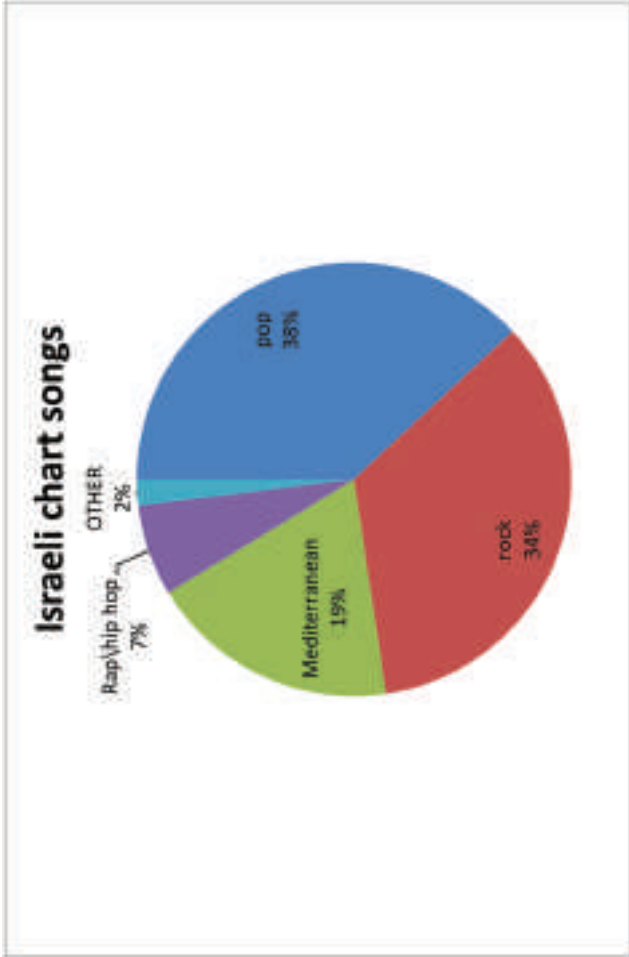


Figure 5. Israeli chart songs, by genre, 2003–2015.

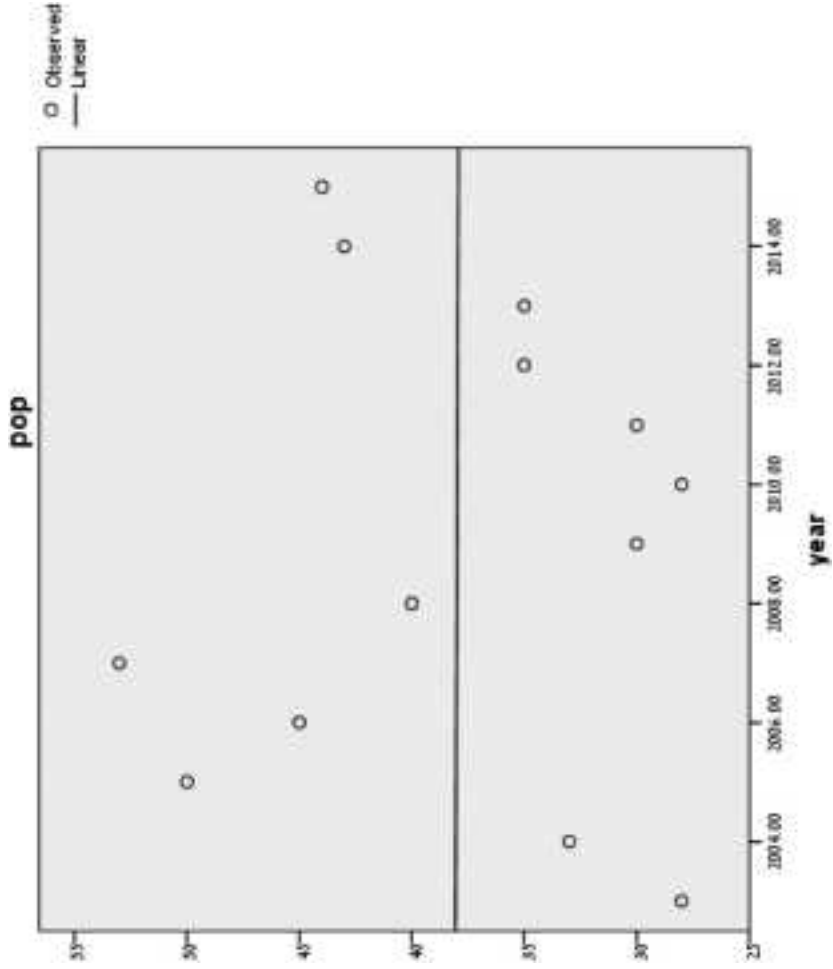


Figure 6. Pop music in ISRAELI CHARTS, 2003–2015.

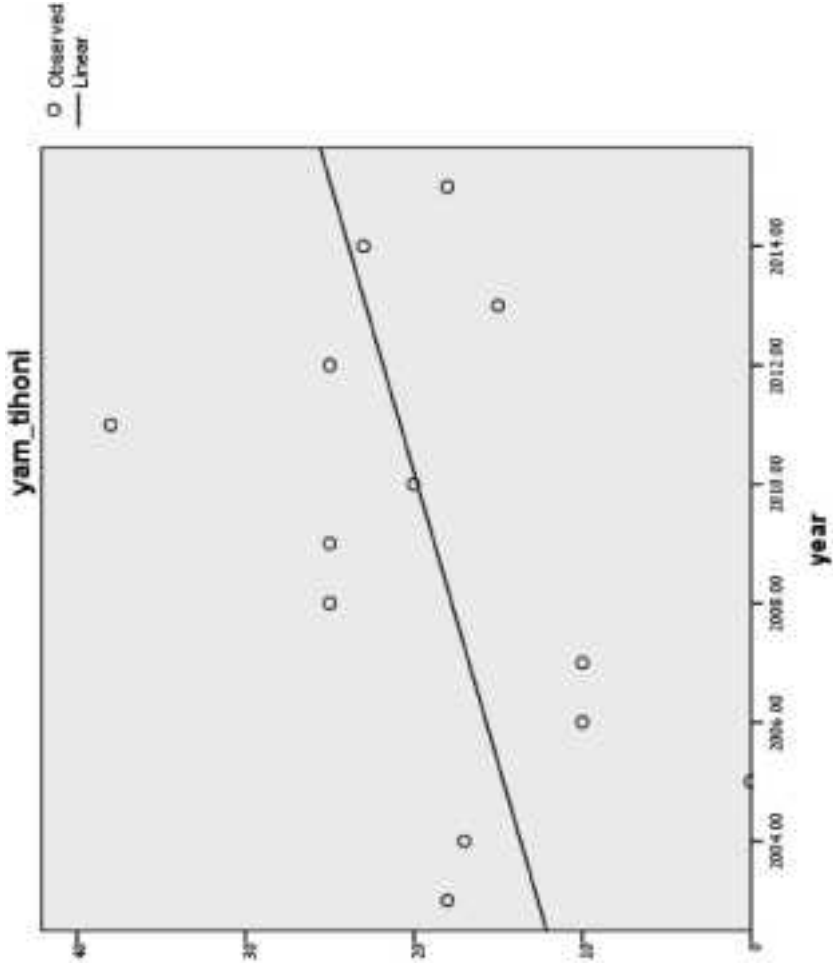


Figure 7. Rock music in Israeli charts, 2003–2015.

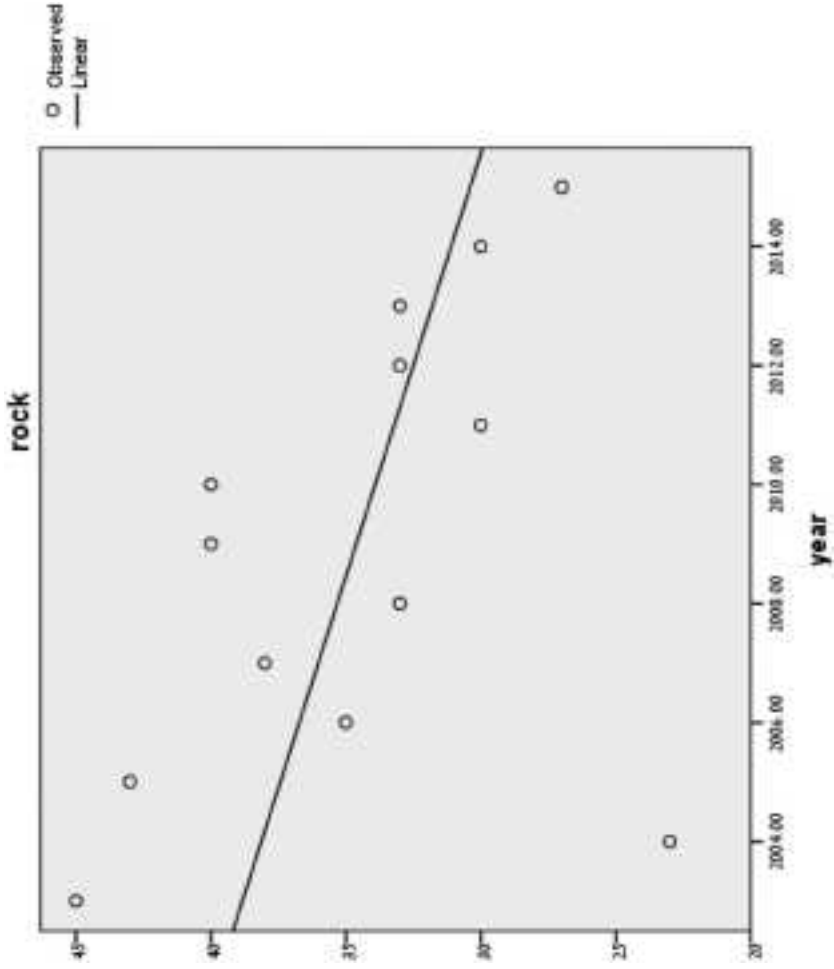


Figure 8. Mediterranean music in Israeli charts, 2003–2015.

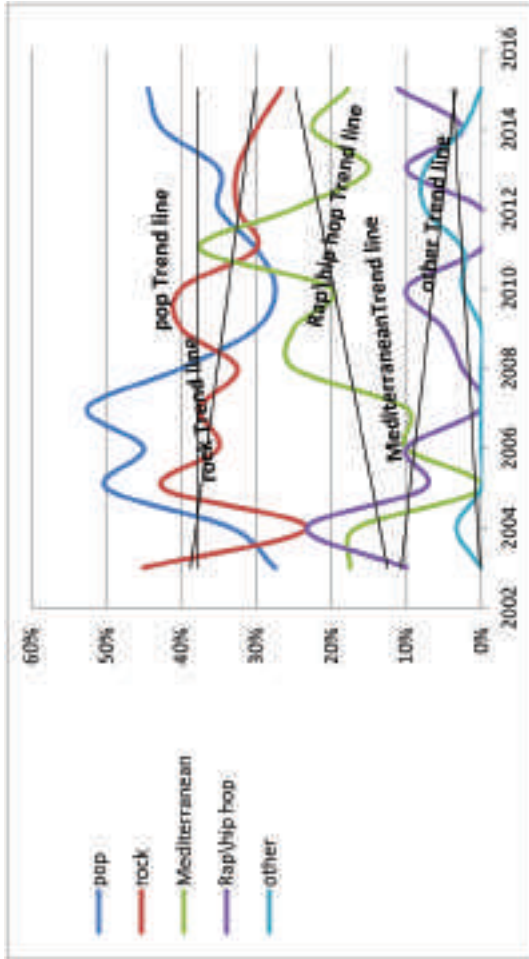


Figure 9. Israeli charts 2003–2015: trend analysis.



## Discussion

This article examined the mix of predominant musical tastes in Israeli society as reflected in the audience votes for the annual charts broadcast by Gal Galatz radio station, the country's most popular station in the past decade. The findings show that pop music was the most popular musical genre in the Israeli and international charts for a significant period. Many of the songs coded as pop songs contain several genres within a single song, confirming findings from numerous studies that have shown that pop songs are popular because of their structure and appeal to a broad common denominator.<sup>82</sup>

It seems that the music industry in Israel and around the world is oriented towards commercial music, created for maximum consumption, similarly to other consumer goods.<sup>83</sup> The world's 'music legends' in the international music industry who earn millions are pop stars: Madonna, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, and others. The music industry in Israel is influenced by international trends, both in the production of music and in the public's reception and popularisation of music, which explains the similar trends in popular international and local Israeli music.<sup>84</sup>

Pop music also appears to be related to the social media era or the 'instant generation,' which typically engages in immediate, rapid consumption of information. The simple melodies, repeated chorus and easy-to-remember texts are consistent with such consumption patterns and allows the audience to consume and fall in love with music very quickly. It is interesting to note that radio stations invest efforts to adapt to the social media era and the Internet generation by delivering songs on social media and using advertising based on emotions and informal speech. Additionally, the audience typically consumes radio as a secondary medium,<sup>85</sup> which explains the tendency to listen to music that is familiar, 'easier to digest,' and does not require the listener's full attention.

As a genre, rock is declining in popularity in both Israeli and international charts. This trend is related to the growing similarity between rock and pop music and other genres such as Mediterranean hip hop.<sup>86</sup> The status of rock music songwriters has similarly declined. In the early 1990s, with the converge of local and commercial radio stations, and the availability of MTV's international channels on cable TV, Israeli audiences were exposed to a wide range of legendary US and UK rock bands such as Metallica, Guns and Roses, Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Blair, Radiohead, U2, Depeche Mode, and Oasis. These artists contributed to listeners' appreciation of rock music and to the development of the genre, which also affected the commercial aspects of rock's popularity.<sup>87</sup>

Mediterranean music operates similarly to pop music. For decades, Mediterranean music was a marginal musical genre in Israel, and because

it was considered 'low' culture, it was rarely played by the media, and was relegated to non-prime-time slots. In the past decade, Mediterranean music has become much more widely broadcast and positioned high on the charts. Its steadily growing popularity in the charts is the result of the genre's self-refinement and its mix of oriental musical elements, trills, and a pop sound. This refinement has opened the genre to a broader listening audience, and has therefore naturally become integrated in the charts and the playlists of Gal Galatz and other radio stations.

Another explanation for the increasing popularity of Mediterranean music is that an increasing number of people of oriental origin work in the local music industry, the media, and the world of culture as politicians, radio stations managers, programmes managers, public relations, broadcasters, and music editors. Their background and personal taste presumably affect their decisions to give new music a platform and promote Mediterranean music. In the past decade, Mediterranean artists were the most profitable artists in the Israeli music industry. According to data published by ACUM (Association of Composers and Music Publishers Authors in Israel), the majority of the 10 most popular songs in 2015 belong to the Mediterranean genre. Fans of this genre typically consume this music by buying concert tickets, cellphone ringtones, and holding private concerts at family occasions, participating in karaoke nights, and viewing commercial music channels (such as Channels 24 and 25, and Radio Lev Hamidina), all of which have fuelled the production of Mediterranean music among music industry people. Mediterranean music is currently considered the conventional accompaniment to personal and official celebratory events, and performances of Mediterranean artists are in high demand. Omer Adam, for example, sold several tens of thousands of tickets to a single concert in a pre-sale campaign, highlighting the connection between popular music and economic profit, as Negus claims.<sup>88</sup>

Findings show that the same contents that appeared consistently in radio broadcasts were also chosen by the audience to lead the annual charts. The research literature notes that radio stations tend to combine simple, easy-to-digest contents. The findings of the current study reinforce the finding that this kind of content is very frequently chosen in the charts. Finally, the findings of this study confirm that, as the Frankfurt School claimed, popular taste becomes increasingly uniform under the influence of the media, which appeal to the lowest common denominator by producing popular music.

## Limitations

This article was based on classifications of songs by genre. The boundaries between musical genres are not, however, always clear cut, and songs may be equally associated with several musical genres. Coders were instructed to

identify the most salient elements in each song and to attribute songs to the most appropriate genres, yet other researches might make other classifications. Furthermore, hit parade voters, who made an effort to vote, are considered more active listeners, and therefore are not necessarily a representative sample of radio listeners in general.

## Conclusion

The predominant musical mix in Israeli society is affected by a number of factors including regulation, new technology, the structure of the music market and industry, international trends, music artists who conform to commercial demands by creating catchy songs, public relations that promote artists for financial reasons, viral posts on social media, and easy access to music. In addition, music editors influence radio stations' playlists. Together, these factors influence the personal taste of the audience, which loops back to affect the music editing process performed by the stations. The predominant musical mix in the Israeli society mainly comprises pop music and includes a smaller proportion of increasingly popular Mediterranean music. The audience apparently prefers the simple content that the music industry prefers to broadcast.

The findings in this article may contribute to sociological discussions about the Israeli culture. This study is relevant to the contemporary public debate in Israel on the status of sub-cultures in Israeli society and the appropriate composition of its mix. In the current study, the predominant musical mix is reflected in the charts. The question of whether radio stations affect the common musical taste in Israel remains to be explored by future studies that examine whether genres that are regularly played by radio stations correspond to audience taste. Finally, comparisons of playlists or leading international charts are warranted to examine the connection between the most popular musical tastes in the world and those in Israel.

## Notes

1. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 16.
2. Laor, "Alternative broadcasting? Not here. Educational radio programs," 20–3; idem, "Journalist 2.0?"
3. Shwiki, "Listening Habits Survey"; Laor, Lissitsa, and Galily, "Online digital Radio Apps Usages in Israel"; Laor, "How Does It Sound? Audiences, broadcasters and managers on visual radio in Israel" and Moshe, Laor and Fridkin, "Gendered Online Listening?"
4. Nielsen, "Music U.S. Report."
5. Ibid.
6. Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry."
7. Regev, *Culture Sociology*.

8. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 14.
9. Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective"; Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production"; Regev, *Culture Sociology*.
10. See note 6 above.
11. Ibid.
12. Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 47.
13. Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production," 170.
14. Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," 316.
15. Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 37–42.
16. Ahlqvist and Fisher, "And the Hits Just Keep on Coming," 318–9; Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry"; Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," 326–7; Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 37–40.
17. Regev, *Culture Sociology*, 95–116.
18. Hendy, "Pop Music Radio in the Public Service," 745–7.
19. Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production," 164–5.
20. Berry and Waldfogel, "Public Radio in the United States," 192–3; and Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity," 69–70.
21. Berry and Waldfogel, "Public Radio in the United States," 209–10.
22. Lee, "Predicting Cultural Output Diversity in the Radio Industry," 338–40.
23. Ahlqvist and Fisher, "Music Programming Standardization"; Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 758–60; Lee, "Predicting Cultural Output Diversity," 333; Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity," 66; and Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," 326–7.
24. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 5–6.
25. Hennion, "An Intermediary Between Production and Consumption," 419.
26. Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 745–7; and Rothenbuhler, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music."
27. Jones and Rahn, "Definitions of Popular Music," 13.
28. Kaplan, "Programming and Editing as Alternative Logics of Music Radio Production," 761.
29. Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 21.
30. Ibid.; Shuker, *Popular Music Culture*, 110.
31. Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 21–42.
32. Denzin, "Problems in Analyzing Elements of Mass Culture."
33. Regev, "Articulate or Hopeless," 117.
34. Ibid.
35. Bennett, Shank, and Toynbee, *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, 250; and Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," 120.
36. Adorno, "On Popular Music."
37. Ibid.
38. Rothenbuhler, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music," 78–80.
39. Ahlqvist and Faulkner, "Will this Record Work for Us?" 196–7.
40. Bonet and Fernandez-Quijada, "Public Service Radio Facing the New Competitive Environment in Catalonia," 5–7; Chapman, "The 1960s Pirates," 175–6; Kleinstauber and Sonnenberg, "Beyond Public Service and Private Profit," 90–1; Larson, "Presidential News Coverage," 349; Rothenbuhler, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music," 78–80; and Sabir, "Public Media and Multicultural Globe," 223.

41. Berry and Waldfogel, "Public Radio in the United States," 190; and Irvine, Nick, "Commercial Radio," 38–9; and Rothenbuhler, "Commercial Radio," 125–7.
42. Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 743; Kemppainen, "Channel Reform of Public Service Radio in the Nordic Countries," 136; and Poindexter, "Radio in Paris," 263–4.
43. Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 743.
44. Moshe, "Right-Wing Pirate Radio Broadcasting in Israel," 71–2.
45. Sabir, "Public Media and Multicultural," 236–7.
46. Laor, "The Added Value of College Radio"; and idem, "Milestones in the Development of Educational Radio in Israel."
47. Soffer, *Mass communication in Israel*, 194–8.
48. *Ibid.*, 194.
49. Soffer, "Galei Tzahal."
50. *Ibid.*, 97.
51. Regev, "Cultural in the Music Industry in Israel," 117; and Soffer, *Galei Tzahal*, 50.
52. Soffer, "Galei Tzahal," 108–9.
53. *Ibid.*, 49.
54. Kaplan, "Neo-institutional Analysis," 141–3; and Regev, "Cultural in the Music Industry in Israel," 117.
55. Kantar, *Exposer Data in Journalism and Radio*.
56. Kaplan, "The rise in 'light' Middle Eastern music," 141–3.
57. *Ibid.*, 141.
58. *Ibid.*, 153.
59. *Ibid.*, 144.
60. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, 26–49.
61. Kaplan, "The Rise in 'Light' Middle Eastern Music," 148–50; and Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music*, 26–49.
62. Dunch, "Beyond Cultural Imperialism," 301–2; Galily and Sheard, "Cultural Imperialism and Sport," 75–6; and Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music in Israel*, 315.
63. Stokes, "Music and the Global Order," 52.
64. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music in Israel*, 317.
65. Hall, "Encryption Decryption," 391–2.
66. *Ibid.*, 394.
67. Fiske, "Television: Polysemy and Popularity," 173.
68. Hall, "Encryption Decryption," 399–401.
69. Fiske, "Television: Polysemy and Popularity," 186–7.
70. See note 68 above.
71. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music in Israel*, 26–49.
72. Ahlqvist and Fisher, "Music Programming Standardization," 314–8; Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 745–7; Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," 49–50; and Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," 326–7.
73. Kaplan, "The Rise in 'Light' Middle Eastern Music," 153–5.
74. See note 71 above.
75. See note 55 above.
76. Adorno, "On Popular Music"; and Regev, "Cultural in the Music Industry," 117.

77. Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," 49–51; and Shuker, *Popular Music Culture*, 259.
78. See note 71 above.
79. *Ibid.*; Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 69.
80. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music in Israel*.
81. *Ibid.*
82. Ahlkvist and Fisher, "Music Programming Standardization," 117; Hendy, "Pop Music Radio," 745–7; Lee, "Predicting Cultural Output Diversity," 338–9; Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity," 75–6; and Peterson and Anand, "The Production of Culture Perspective," 326–7.
83. Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 135–48.
84. See note 71 above.
85. Samuel-Azran, Laor, and Tal, "Who Listens to Podcasts, and Why?"
86. Regev, *Rock: Music and Culture*, 123.
87. See note 71 above.
88. See note 8 above.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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